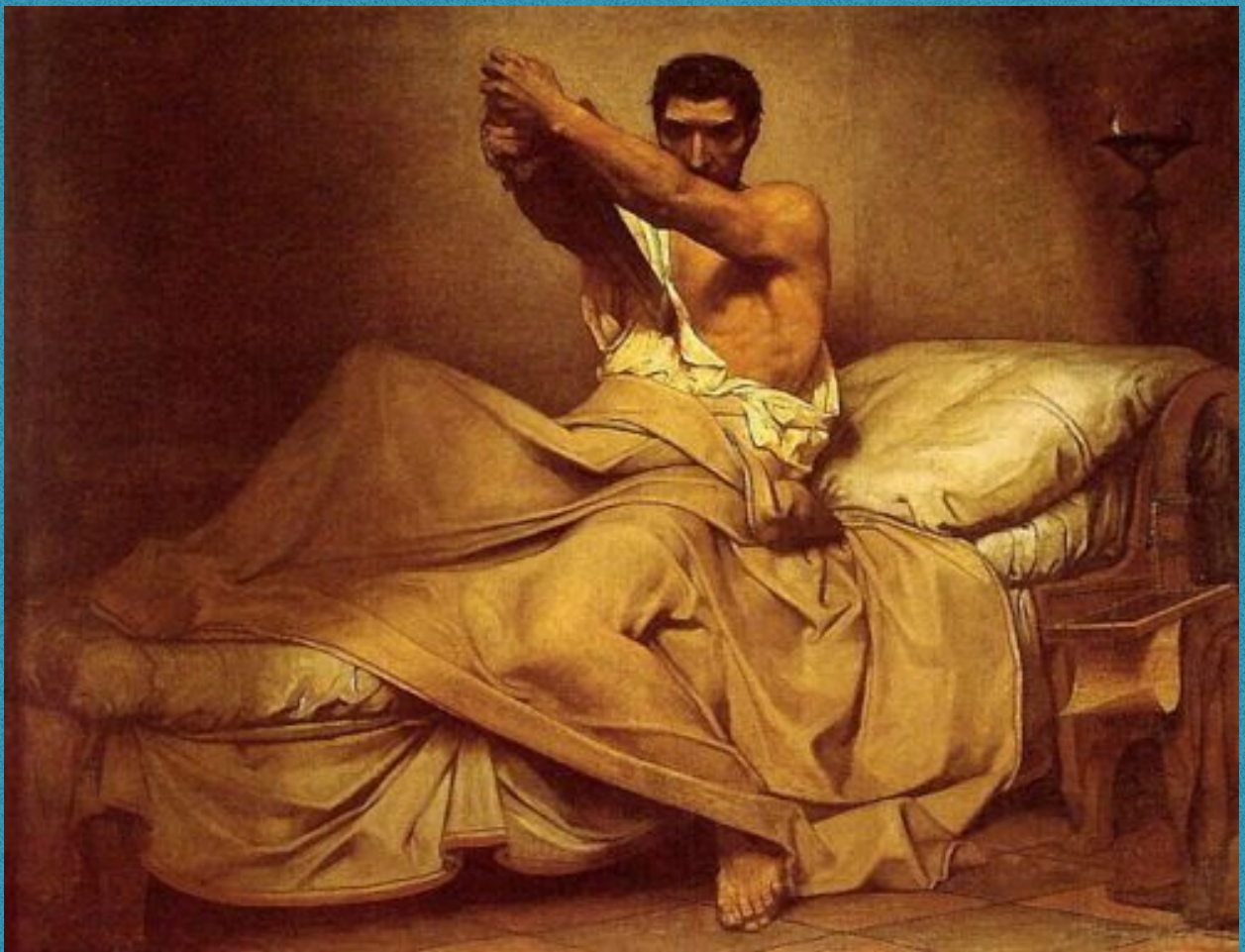


The Cato Chronicles

selected essays from the How To Be A Stoic blog

by Massimo Pigliucci, City College of New York



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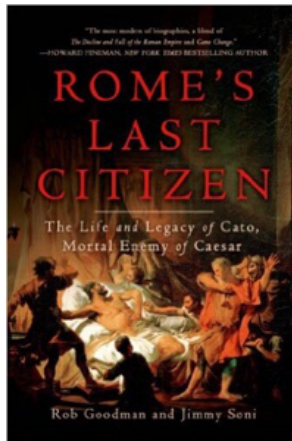
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I. Young Cato



Cato the Younger, also known as Cato Uticensis, is the quintessential Stoic role model, arguably second only to Socrates among people who actually existed (the Stoics also referred to mythological role models, like Heracles), and Seneca famously cites him a number of times throughout his writings. Rob Goodman and Jimmy Soni have published an entertaining biography of Cato, titled [Rome's Last Citizen: The Life and Legacy of Cato, Mortal Enemy of Caesar](#). This series of essays is meant to highlight some of the most interesting bits from the book.

Goodman and Soni, of course, are not writing from a Stoic perspective, though they are more sympathetic to Stoicism than Frank McLynn, the author of a recent and [hopelessly botched biography of Marcus Aurelius](#). Goodman and Soni are looking at Cato qua historical figure, not as the Sage idealized by Seneca, but even so, we will see that they find much to admire in Cato, in part as a result of his commitment to Stoicism.

The book opens with what is very likely an apocryphal story, recounted by Plutarch. It's a story that is meant to convey a truth about the future man, as well as to impart a moral lesson. It is the year 91 BCE, and Cato is a four-year old child, already an orphan. A family friend, Pompaedius Silo, is visiting the house, and Cato upsets him so much that he grabs the boy by his ankles and dangles him outside of a window, threatening to let him go unless Cato agreed that the land reforms proposed by Silo's party were good for Rome (I guess the Romans thought it meaningful to talk politics with small children!). Cato, allegedly, just stared at his captor without budging, until Silo gave up, pulled him back and said: "How lucky for Italy that he is a boy; if he were a man, I don't think we could get a single vote." That ought to give you a measure of the kid's character! As the authors put it: "The story shows Cato grabbed by an overwhelming force, facing death, and evincing utter calm in the face of it."

The relevant political background is complex. Land reform had been attempted before in the Roman Republic, and had led to the gruesome deaths of Rome's most famous radicals, [the Gracchus brothers](#), Tiberius and Gaius. The Gracchi were representatives of the plebe, and were making very reasonable demands about the redistribution of land away from the hands of few powerful aristocrats, demands that — it has been argued — if met would have forestalled, if not avoided, the decline of the Republic and its descent (or ascent, depending on your point of view) into empire. But said aristocrats were powerful enough to stop attempts at reform, both legally and, when needed, by blooding the streets of Rome — after which they had the galls of building a new Temple of Concord to “celebrate” the reunification of the people of Rome. (Image: Temple of Concord, Rome)



The strife lasted for a decade, and resulted in the solidifying of two political factions: the populares (men of the people), and the optimates (literally, the best people, i.e., the aristocracy). Cato became a life-long member of the optimates, which eventually put him on a collision course with Julius Caesar, who sought the support of the populares. But I'm getting ahead of the story.

Interestingly, Cato's own uncle and legal guardian, Marcus Livius Drusus, was a supporter of the reforms, which is presumably why he had invited Silo into his house. But the rest of the Senate opposed Drusus, managed to reverse some legislation he had been able to pass, he was soon killed in his own house by an unknown man.

Shortly thereafter, the Republic became engulfed in a civil war between two generals, [Lucius Cornelius Sulla](#) and [Gaius Marius](#). Sulla eventually won out and named himself dictator for life. (The title of Dictator was conferred by the Senate to an extraordinary individual in times of extreme peril, and was supposed to be relinquished after the danger had passed. I guess Sulla forgot that detail, or perhaps was convinced that Rome was in permanent danger, and would therefore need him for the rest of his life.)

Sulla had little respect for either law or tradition, embarking in a killing spree of his political opponents and, moreover, in a systematic campaign of confiscation of their properties to enrich himself and his cronies.

Interestingly, Sulla was indirectly responsible, of all things, for the spread of philosophy to Rome. Since Athens had sided with the king of Pontus, Mithridates, against Rome, Sulla laid siege to the ancient Greek city, entered it, and burned it. This resulted in the [diaspora of a large number of philosophers](#), including the Stoics, who relocated in various places, chiefly Alexandria, Rhodes, and, of course, Rome.

This background is crucial to understand Cato's whole life, since, as Goodman and Soni put it, "Cato and his half brother often sat by Sulla's side [because they were aristocrats, often invited by Sulla], eyewitnesses to the arbitrary power of a man fond of making the Senate listen to his harangues and the cries of the executed at the same time."

While Sulla did squash any attempt at land reform — and should therefore be counted among the ranks of the optimates — he did so without regard to Roman law, a fact that he fully realized, to the point that he actually introduced legislation aimed at avoiding another meteoric rise like his own to ever happen again in the future, apparently thinking of his autocratic government as having the objective of ending all future autocratic governments. Needless to say, it didn't work, and Sulla's actions — on the contrary —

provided an excellent precedent for those of Julius Caesar, which did lead straight to the establishment of the empire under Caesar's adoptive son, Octavian.

But back to Cato, here are Goodman and Soni again: "as a teenager watching the imposition of Sulla's platform by fiat, Cato was shocked by the blood it required — shocked not just secondhand but daily and in person, as he reclined with the dictator on his couch. Here was Cato's early education in politics: his guardian's assassination, and Sulla's government by murder. This boyhood in civil war would produce a man with an almost neurotic attachment to rules, to precedent, to propriety — to everything that was not Sulla."

Let me conclude this first round of the Cato chronicles with a second episode from his youth, again possibly apocryphal (though more likely to be true than the first one), and again representative of both the man and the myth.

Going back home with his tutor from one of Sulla's horrific sessions, Cato asked why nobody got rid of the dictator. The tutor told him that "men fear him more than they hate him." To which Cato promptly responded "Give me a sword, so I might kill him and set my country free of slavery." From that day on, his tutor checked if Cato was hiding a dagger every time they left the house.

II. Cato becomes a Stoic



We have seen how Cato the Younger, one of the classical Stoic role models (especially for Seneca), grew up in a milieu of turmoil and civil war, directly witnessing the atrocities and disregard for the law perpetrated by general Sulla, the victor of a bloody civil war that had divided the Republic. We have also seen the stories that are told about Cato's youth, during which he certainly displayed some proto-Stoic virtues, especially courage and a sense of justice (though limited by his own time and place: "freeing my country from slavery," for him, meant that the

aristocracy would regain control and overthrow the tyrant, not that actual slaves would be freed.)

We now consider a later period of the early life of Cato, which culminates into his very conscious embracing of Stoic philosophy, a pivotal decision that will mark him — for better or for worse — for the rest of his life.

We need to go back a couple of generations, to Cato's grandfather, known as [Cato the Elder](#). He was not rich, but owned some land, which he worked with his own hands, shoulder to shoulder with his slaves, with whom he shared meals. He went off to war in 217 BCE, as a young man, and came back with plenty of scars to prove his courage and military value. One of Cato the Elder's neighbors was a patrician Senator, and "discovered" him, bringing him to Rome to begin a political career as one of the best living examples of what was referred to as *Latinitas*, a term reflecting the ideal of an unpolished but authentically Roman man, one for whom honor and civil and military pride were all that mattered.

Once in Rome, Cato built a reputation as an incorruptible paragon of virtue, so much so that people started saying, when wanting to excuse themselves for not being perfect, “what do you expect? We are not Catos.”

His clout grew so much that he was eventually able to take on the most famous man in Rome, [Scipio Africanus](#), the guy who had defeated Hannibal. As Goodman and Soni put it: “Scipio was as urbane a man as his era could have produced, a Graecophile patron of foreign philosophers whose war record made him a legend in his own time. To Cato, Scipio was a disgustingly liberal spender with no concept of military discipline. To Scipio, Cato was a crabbed and cruel leader of men whose mercilessness in the provinces only sowed the seeds of more insurgency. Their rivalry, which spanned two decades, was at the heart of Rome’s culture war.”

Eventually, Cato’s traditionalist faction managed to bring charges of corruption against the illustrious general. Though Scipio was not actually condemned, his reputation never recovered, he went into self-imposed exile, and before dying he left instructions that his body should not be brought back to Rome, but buried with the following inscription: “Ungrateful Fatherland, you will not even have my bones.”

The conflict with Carthage, which had made Scipio famous, however, wasn’t over. And, somewhat ironically, the constant danger posed by that city to Roman interests became Cato the Elder’s mantra for years. He would end every discourse in the Senate with the refrain: “[Carthago delenda est](#),” Carthage must be destroyed — which, eventually, did happen.

Incidentally, the older Cato turned out to be capable of changing his mind and adapting to the times. Despite his antipathy for all things foreign, for instance, he taught himself Greek at the age of 80, something I’d like to be able to do...

A crucial episode, illuminating about both Cato’s, happened in 155 BCE, when the Younger wasn’t born yet and his grandfather was already old. Rome received a delegation

of diplomats from Athens, to renegotiate some sanctions imposed on the Greek city because of an earlier aggression against a Roman protectorate. The delegation in question was made entirely of philosophers: Carneades the Skeptic, Critolaus the Aristotelian, and Diogenes the Stoic. This was the first time that such high-level profile philosophers visited Rome, and the three gave public lectures in front of enthusiastic crowds, to the disgust of conservatives like Cato. The Elder was particularly upset when Carneades dared defend both sides of the same argument, to show that one needs to be skeptical of argumentation itself. Cato made sure that the Greek delegates were sent packing a few days afterwards. As we shall see in a moment, his grandson will develop a very different approach to philosophy.

So let us jump two generations and arrive at the time of Cato the Younger, when the myth of a past golden age of Rome, where people were better and wiser, had taken hold of the capital of the Republic, just as it periodically takes hold of pretty much every place on earth (for instance, in current US of A). “Our” Cato also admired previous generations, and particularly his still revered grandfather, whom he considered a role model in the pursuit of preserving the Republic. As a consequence, he consciously set out on a path of what Goodman and Soni call “a lifelong project of calculated anachronism,” which quickly led him to the very same people his grandfather had expelled from Rome: the Stoics.

Why did Cato the Younger embrace Stoicism, something that his grandfather certainly would not have approved? Goodman and Soni provide a complex, but likely at the least partially correct explanation. “To begin with, the Stoics were as hard, as uncompromising, as Cato the Younger aspired to be. They taught: Whether you were a foot underwater or a fathom, you were still drowning. ... Fools were universal. Even practicing Stoics lumped themselves in as equally foolish, equally mired in error and sin, and equally miserable. Of sages, who alone were happy, Socrates himself was perhaps the only known case. What could such a philosophy possibly offer to the aspiring fool? At the very least, it offered the possibility of swimming toward air.”

I suspect Goodman and Soni overestimate the harshness of Stoic philosophy, but it is a historical fact that it has always been inspiring to people who also embraced an ethos of toughness and independence with regard to the vicissitudes of life, and Cato was surely one such person.

Cato made his own the fundamental Stoic ideas that we can train ourselves to be indifferent to anything that is outside of our control, and that we should try to live life “according to nature,” which means — for humans — by the light of reason. It also means, as Nietzsche (not a Stoic!) later put it, *amor fati*, love your fate, so that you are never disappointed or distraught by what happens to you. The promised reward was freedom from the passions, i.e., negative, destructive emotions.

Again, Goodman and Soni: “What the Stoics offered Cato was not idle speculation, but a way of being, a simple and ready-made life that had already been cut to fit his character. ... Stoicism became, above all, a practical guide to life. The Stoics who flourished in Rome were the ones who set aside their more implausible doctrines and tailored their teaching to a people who loved things that worked.” So, Cato must have thought, Stoicism coupled with Roman patriotism will make for a formidable weapon in defense of the values he held dear, the same values his grandfather had become proverbial for preserving and applying with integrity.

This second chapter of Goodman and Soni’s book ends with a famous and illustrative episode: “Seneca, the great imperial Stoic, relates the story of what Cato did when, visiting the baths one day, he was shoved and struck. Once the fight was broken up, he simply refused to accept an apology from the offender: ‘I don’t even remember being hit.’”

III. Commander, and brother



Following the progression of [Rome's Last Citizen](#), we have so far examined [Cato's youth](#) and the environment in which he grew up, as well as [his turn to Stoicism](#). We now consider two crucial episodes that took place when he was in his late '20s: his first military command, and the death of his half-brother Caepio.

Cato launched his political career at age 28, submitting his name for the office of [military tribune](#), a classic stepping stone toward the Senate. He distinguished himself already on the campaign trail, refusing to go around canvassing for votes with the aid of a “[nomenclator](#),” a person in charge of reminding him who the people he was talking to were, helping him pretend that he knew them better than he actually did. This was not Cato's style, however. No subterfuges or tricks: he would approach potential voters on his own, and if he didn't know them he would frankly admit it and engage them anyway. It worked, he was elected for the year 67 BCE, and given a command in Macedonia, as part of Roman operations against an old foe, [Mithridates](#).

Cato joined a fully professional army, whose soldiers were difficult to impress, particularly when they expected a city slicker who was going to spend a year with them just so that he could build credentials for his next move in his political career. But Cato's soldiers were in for a surprise. To begin with, and to set the right tone, as Goodman and Soli put it, “He approached camp not on horseback, as expected, but on foot. This was not one of the social climbers whom they had come to expect as commander.” Moreover, they soon discovered that “his style of leadership was a remarkably liberal one for the time. Rather than reach for the lash at first resort, Cato made a point of reasoning with his men.”

As Goodman and Soli reminds us, Stoicism fits well (to this day, see [here](#) and [here](#), for a famous example) with the military life, since it emphasizes the virtue of being “indifferent”

to material conditions and concentrate instead on one's excellence of character and practice of the virtues. Cato was effective with his troops because he wasn't just talking about Stoicism, he was an obvious example of actual practice, and his men loved him for it: "On the day of his departure ceremony, as the tribune left on foot, soldiers threw down their cloaks for him to walk on. They reportedly wept and kissed his hands."

At one point Cato took a furlough from the army and spent some time in Pergamon, the ancient city in Asia Minor famous for the production of parchment (pergamena in Italian, which makes the connection obvious), and for housing one of the most complete libraries of antiquity. There lived the famous Stoic Athenodorus, presiding over what is reported to be more than 200,000 scrolls, which included the writings of the original Greek Stoics, from Zeno on, several of which had not yet appeared in Rome, and that Cato could now consult to his leisure. What a deep shame that pretty much the entire library is lost to the sands of time. (Image: the theater at Pergamon, photo by the author)



Cato and Athenodorus became friends, and when the latter was threatened because of allegedly editing some of the Stoic texts, Cato offered him protection. Athenodorus eventually sailed back to Rome with Cato, and died there several years later.

Shortly after coming back to his legion, Cato received a letter telling him that his half-brother, Caepio — who was also serving in the same theater of operations — was seriously ill. The two were very close to each other: “Once, when Cato was a boy in Rome, someone had asked him whom he loved the most. ‘My brother.’ Second most? ‘My brother.’ Third most? ‘My brother.’” When Caepio died, Cato reacted in the most un-Stoic way imaginable: “He embraced [his brother’s body], sobbed over it, ordered the best incense and the best clothes burned with it on a high pyre, ordered a massive marble likeness of Caepio set up in the market of the provincial Thracian town in which he had never before set foot — lavishing on the dead the luxury he railed against for the living.”

Needless to say, this episode haunted Cato for the rest of his life, in the eyes of his critics, an example of the uselessness of his much vaunted philosophy. This was probably uncharitable, as we have already seen, and we will continue to see in the next installments of this series, that Cato did live, and die, largely in accordance with his philosophy. He wasn’t faking it, he was the genuine article.

But even Stoic role models are human, and never quite reach the stage of a Sage. Cato loved his brother deeply, and he went to pieces when he suddenly died. This doesn’t make him less of a Stoic practitioner, as practitioners are students who strive to improve, they aren’t perfect masters of the art. How, then, should Cato have reacted to the news, according to Stoic philosophy? Following something like this famous advice from Epictetus (who, of course, wouldn’t be born for another couple of centuries):

“You must remind yourself that you love a mortal, and that nothing that you love is your very own; it is given you for the moment, not for ever nor inseparably, but like a fig or a bunch of grapes at the appointed season of the year, and if you long for it in winter you are a fool. So too if you long for your son or your friend, when it is not given you to have him, know that you are longing for a fig in winter time.” (Discourses III, 24)

This is, of course, a hard concept to get across to non-Stoics without immediately being accused of being a cold sociopath or something along those lines. But a major point of Stoic philosophy is to help people see reality for what it is, and in the process aid them in overcoming destructive emotions and nurturing positive ones. Love for one's brother is a positive thing, desperation at his death and waste of resources to honor him are destructive of the spirit as well as in a material sense.

So the fact that Cato did not live up, on that occasion, to his philosophy cannot credibly be used to level a charge of hypocrisy against him. But does the episode shed some cold light on the limits of the philosophy itself, which perhaps requires superhuman efforts, even damaging ones, of its practitioners? That is both a philosophical and an empirical question. Empirically, we know of plenty of people who have been helped by the adoption of a Stoic stance, which in some cases they even credit for saving their life (see the links above about James Stockdale's ordeal in Vietnam). Philosophically, the same sort of objection could be deployed against any demanding philosophy or religion, for instance Buddhism and Christianity. That doesn't necessarily invalidate those approaches to human existence, as their practitioners can turn the table around and argue that of course it is difficult to make progress, that's part of the point of practicing to begin with. Just like only Buddha achieved enlightenment, and only Jesus is worthy of worship, so perhaps Socrates was the rare example of an actual Sage. Or, more likely, these are all ideal role models we can use as inspiration, without beating ourselves too much if we somehow fall short of them.

IV. The clash with Cicero



We have so far examined stories about [Cato the Younger's childhood](#), his very conscious [embracing of Stoicism](#), as well as his first assignment as military commander and [his rather un-Stoic reaction](#) to the death of his half-brother. Another of the pivotal episodes of his life was his clash with the eminent orator and philosopher Cicero, during the famous [Catiline conspiracy](#). We will therefore look at those events to refine our understanding of the man who became a Stoic role model.

First, the historical setting. We are in the year 63 BCE, and Senator Lucius Sergius Catilina is organizing a conspiracy to overthrow his colleagues and implement radical land reforms that would have redistributed much of the wealth in the Republic, away from the few aristocrats who held it, and toward, among others, a number of disgruntled veterans of recent wars. It was the usual, long established opposition between the populares (the plebe) and the optimates (the aristocracy), that we have seen at the beginning of this series, with Cato firmly aligned with the latter faction. (We need not attribute noble sentiments to Catilina, by the way, who was a bankrupt aristocrat in search of redemption and of a new shot at public life.) By this time, Catilina — whose attempts at getting elected consul had been thwarted by (possibly unfounded, possibly not) charges of corruption — had had enough and had reached the conclusion that only violent means would achieve the objective.

Cicero, a rising political star who did truly come from non-aristocratic background, saw the writing on the wall and mounted a series of preemptive strikes against Catilina, including running for the office of Consul that year, in order to forestall the impending disaster. The aristocracy supported Cicero not because they particularly liked him, as he

was, in effect, an outsider, but because they were desperate to avoid the Catiline revolution.

In the same year, Cato ran for the post of People's Tribune, which was rather odd, given his allegiance to the optimates. It was, however, legal, as Cato's family itself technically did not belong to the Roman aristocracy. Cato and Cicero at first joined forces against what they saw as a mortal threat to the very existence of the Republic.

Cicero had been warning his fellow citizens for a while about Catilina, but his warnings had largely been unheeded, and in fact people began to suspect that the threat was made up, or exaggerated, by Cicero himself, in order to further his career. However, one of Cicero's allies, the military commander and stupendously rich man Marcus Licinius Crassus, was able to provide hard evidence of the conspiracy in the form of a letter describing detailed plans to murder a number of Senators opposed to the reforms.

Cato was present at the emergency meeting of the Senate called by Cicero, at the end of which the orator was given extraordinary powers to swiftly end the conspiracy. When, shortly thereafter, Cicero publicly confronted Catilina, the latter responded by (illegally) declaring himself Consul and then promptly fleeing the city to join his army, camped not very far.

Here is where things get complicated as well as interesting, because they help us draw a sharp distinction between the two friends-soon-to-be-rivals, Cicero and Cato. During the previous summer, the consular election had been won by Lucius Lucinius Murena, a former legionary commander, and Decimus Junius Silanus, Cato's brother-in-law. Both had achieved their goal by way of (not at all uncommon) massive bribes.

Cicero had pushed a new law — with the important and very vocal support of Cato — that raised the penalty for bribery to ten years of exile. Murena, who was scheduled to take over as consul in a few months, was swiftly brought up for charges of corruption (though, interestingly, not so Silanus). Cicero, somewhat unexpectedly, offered to defend Murena,

while Cato was set to deliver the closing argument against him, following which Cicero would get time for a rebuttal before the outcome of the trial was going to be decided. Now, why on earth did Cicero agree to defend a man who was patently guilty, especially given that Cicero himself had worked hard to pass the anti-corruption law? Here is where we see the stark difference between Cicero and Cato emerging clearly.

Goodman and Soni explain: “[Cicero’s] calculation was brutally simple. He needed two new, unsullied consuls to hold firm against Catiline. The conviction and exile of one of them would mean political chaos at the worst possible time. And so Murena was to be acquitted.” By contrast, they claim that Cato was “trapped” by his idealism, as he simply could not avoid prosecuting a corrupted politician, given his own public stance (and coherent private practice) on the matter.

Let’s pause for a second here, since this theme of Cato being trapped by his own ideals is a recurrent one in Goodman and Soni’s book, and provides their explanation for Cato’s ultimate tragic failure against Julius Caesar, to which we will get in the next installment of this series. The contrast between Cicero and Cato should indeed give us plenty of food for thought at many levels. They were both philosophically minded, though one primarily a lawyer, the other a soldier and politician. They espoused different philosophies — skeptical Platonism in Cicero’s case, Stoicism in Cato’s, though [Cicero was very sympathetic to Stoicism](#). And they both indubitably cared for the future of the Roman Republic, though in different ways and perhaps with different priorities.

As a result, they found themselves locked into a strange relationship of both friendship and rivalry throughout the best part of their lives: on the one hand, Cicero displayed political savvy and an ability to compromise in order to achieve his objectives, though at times his willingness to adjust to the situation on the ground bordered on hypocrisy or opportunism. On the other hand, Cato was the light of virtue and integrity that inspired his followers, and that was much admired by Cicero, even though it was that very same sense of honor that led him to fail to build the sort of political coalition that might have turned the fortunes of the Republic and avoided descent into empire.

And now to the very public clash between the two titans. Cato took the stage to present his case against Murena, and although we do not have a direct transcript of his speech, parts of it survive through Cicero's quotations of him in his rebuttal:

"Shall you seek to obtain supreme power, supreme authority, and the helm of the Republic, by encouraging men's sensual appetites, by soothing their minds, by tendering luxuries to them? Are you asking employment as a pimp from a band of delicate youths, or the sovereignty of the world from the Roman people?"

This is Cato in his most moralizing mood, which he could carry off because of his immense reputation for integrity. And yet, Cicero turned the table on his rival-friend by gently but firmly mocking both his moral stance and, more broadly, his Stoic philosophy. Goodman and Soni: "'There once was a man of the greatest genius,' Cicero began, 'called Zeno. The imitators of his example are called Stoics.' What came next was a three-minute tour of every ridiculous, paradoxical, or overthought piece of Stoic doctrine — a tour that was only possible because Cato's school was still esoteric enough to be a curiosity."

Please remember that Cicero himself actually [wrote a book](#) defending the so-called Stoic paradoxes, but on this occasion he needed to set aside philosophical nuance and score a vital political point. As Goodman and Soni correctly explain, Cicero got away with it for a couple of reasons: first, because most people in attendance were not sufficiently familiar with Stoic principles to see that he was distorting and trivializing them; second, because the Stoics had indeed always been fond of uttering *prima facie* bizarre sentences in order to gain an opening with their interlocutors and proceed to explain what they meant in depth — it was a pedagogic tool. Cicero, of course, did no such clarification follow-up during his oration.

Instead, he launched into a mock dialogue with himself to make plain the absurdity of the Stoic position (the italics represent imaginary-Cato's lines):

Do any suppliants, miserable and unhappy men, come to us?

You will be a wicked and infamous man if you do anything under the influence of mercy.

Does anyone confess that he has done wrong, and beg pardon for his error?

To pardon is a crime of the deepest dye.

But it is a trifling offense!

All offenses are equal!....

You're not influenced by the facts, but your own opinion.

A wise man never has mere opinions!... I said in the Senate that I would prosecute.

Oh, but you said that when you were angry.

A WISE MAN IS NEVER ANGRY!

According to Goodman and Soni, "it was one of Cicero's most memorable and dexterous performances. But even more remarkably, he was politic enough to beat Cato without humiliating him."

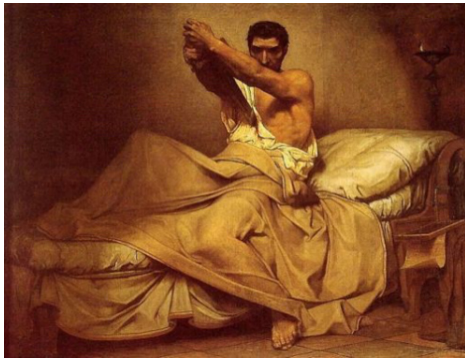
Indeed, Cato took the defeat in stride. His only comment after the proceedings were over, and Murena was acquitted, was "What a witty Consul we have!"

Moreover, Cato's magnanimity manifested itself shortly thereafter, when he defended Cicero's harsh policy against the conspirators, defeating in debate a young, ambitious politician named Gaius Julius Caesar. As a result, the conspirators were executed, and Cato marched at the head of a crowd shouting "Cicero, Father of the Fatherland!"

Despite the recent humiliation handed to him by Cicero, Cato had delivered to the orator the highest point of the latter's life, not because it was politically expedient, but because — in Cato's mind — it was the right thing to do.

The defeated Caesar, however, learned his lesson well, and prepared for the next confrontation by allying himself even more forcefully with the populares, preparing the ground for his ascent to the dictatorship, which eventually led to the final unraveling of the Republic and the beginning of the Empire.

V. Death



We began with a look at [episodes from his childhood](#), and continued with [his embracing of Stoicism](#) as a young man, his first time as a military commander, the contemporaneous [death of his half-brother](#), and the epic [clash with his friend and rival](#), Cicero. I am going to bring the series to an end with two more entries — like the other ones inspired by the reading of Rob Goodman and Jimmy Soni's [Rome's Last Citizen](#). In this episode of the Cato chronicles we'll look at his legendary death, and in the next and last installment to his afterlife, so to speak, i.e., his legacy through history and all the way to modern times.

We last saw Cato debating against Cicero (and losing, with magnanimity) in a high profile case of bribery brought against the Consul elect Lucius Lucinius Murena. That was in 63 BCE, at the height of [the Catiline conspiracy](#). We now jump to his last stand against Julius Caesar, in the northern African city of Utica (hence his alternate name, Cato Uticensis), in 47 BCE. How did he get there?

It's a long and fascinating story, well told in chapters 7-12 of Goodman and Soni's book. But those intervening events are more interesting historically than philosophically, and this, after all, is a philosophy blog. We are concerned here with the biographical details that shed light on Cato's character and his practice of the Stoic virtues. So, suffice it to say that in 50 BCE Julius Caesar, after a very successful campaign in Gaul, was ordered to disband his army and return to Rome to stand trial for corruption, instigated by Cato's political faction, the optimates. Following a stalemate and failed negotiations, Caesar crossed the river Rubicon with one legion — an act that amounted to open treason against the Republic — uttering the famous words *alea iacta est*, the die is cast.

General Pompey, who had issued the order to Caesar, fled Rome, together with many Senators, including Cato (who was very unhappy about it, having become a highly reluctant ally of Pompey, whom he judged to be the lesser of two evils when compared to Caesar). Caesar pursued Pompey in the east, in Illyria, but in 48 BCE his forces were almost annihilated at [the battle of Dyrrhachium](#). On that occasion, Pompey made the fatal strategic mistake of not pursuing the fleeing Caesarian legions, and paid a hefty price at their next engagement, later that same year at [Pharsalus](#), where he was soundly defeated and put on the run. Pompey asked King Ptolemy XII of Egypt for asylum, but was betrayed and slain as soon as he set foot off his boat. Caesar was horrified by this outcome, and proceeded to depose Ptolemy in favor of his sister, [Cleopatra VII](#), who eventually became his lover. (Image: Caesar turns away when offered Pompey's head)



Meanwhile — and here is where Cato rejoins the storyline — the remaining Republican forces regrouped in northern Africa, heading for the provincial capital of Utica, with Cato at the head. An army of about 10,000 men marched for 500 miles in the desert. It took them about 30 days to get to Utica, and Lucan tells us in verse how Cato bore himself during that ordeal:

Bearing his javelin, as one of them
Before the troops he marched: no panting slave
With bending neck, no litter bore his form.
He bade them not, but showed them how to toil.
Spare in his sleep, the last to sip the spring
When at some rivulet to quench their thirst
The eager ranks pressed onward, he alone
Until the humblest follower might drink
Stood motionless.

But when Cato's army arrived in Utica, they found their allies in complete disarray. Rather than organizing a resistance that, with luck, could hold off Caesar for years, they squabbled about who had the highest rank and should command the effort. The contenders were Publius Attius Varus, who had been a commander in the region; Metellus Scipio, an ex-Consul; and Juba, the King of Numidia.

Cato's arrival immediately changed the situation, given that he was now the most famous and prestigious member of the resistance. As Goodman and Soli tells it: "Without a word, Cato simply picked up his chair, walked around the king and the ex-consul, and placed his chair on the other side — which gave Metellus Scipio pride of place in the center." Cato decided to support Scipio because the latter was the highest ranking officer, and Cato saw himself as fighting to uphold the law that he had seen far too many times being trampled by ambitious men, from [Sulla](#) in his youth to Caesar just a few years before.

Here, however, is another case where Goodman and Soli criticize Cato, possibly with some good reason. Despite the fact that Scipio was indeed the highest ranking of the group, he was manifestly less competent than Cato himself, which arguably was the main cause for the eventual disaster that followed. Was Cato risking too much in the name of the purity of his ideals? This is how Plutarch comments on the episode: "He refused to break the laws in whose support they were waging war [against] one who broke them."

He may have passed on the opportunity to take complete charge of the situation, but Cato nonetheless played an important role in the last days of the resistance. At one point, for instance, Scipio and Juba became suspicious of the inhabitants of Utica, thinking that they wanted to betray them and open the city's doors to Caesar's army. As a preemptive measure, they wanted to raze the city and kill its people. Cato was the voice of opposition here, and carried the day, thus sparing the lives of many.

Indeed, Cato was working so hard that even the Caesarian account of things gave him credit: "Cato, who commanded in Utica, was daily enlisting freedmen, Africans, slaves, and all that were of age to bear arms, and sending them without intermission to Scipio's camp."

The first engagement between Caesar's and the Republican forces ended in almost complete defeat for the dictator, whose army suffered great losses, and which was saved at the last minute from encirclement and utter destruction. Scipio, energized by the victory, wanted to engage again Caesar in open battle, but Cato — who had seen and studied his opponent for years — counseled against it. Scipio wrote to Cato that he was a coward and on 6 April 46 BCE gave battle to Caesar anyway. As Goodman and Soli put it, "by afternoon, it was an even fight; by evening, a disaster [for the Republican forces]."

In the wake of the defeat, things looked grim in Utica. Three hundred resident Roman merchants and moneylenders swore to defend the city and Cato with their lives. But eventually they took back their pledge, committing only to fight for Cato's own life in the unlikely case that Caesar would not concede clemency. Just like their ancestors two generations before, in that case referring to Cato the Elder, they excused themselves with the standard phrase: "we are not Catos."

Cato, however, wasn't done yet being Cato. In the chaotic aftermath of the defeat, the Republican cavalry left in Utica began to loot the city, pillaging and killing the locals. Cato intervened again on behalf of the population, and since he was unable to persuade the soldiers with his words, he simply bribed them to go away. He then kept alert despite

fatigue and stress, supervising the preparation of the ships in order to allow as many people to flee before the arrival of Caesar, even buying out of his pocket passage for those who were too poor to afford it.

In the end, he was left with his family and two philosophers friends, Apollonides the Stoic, and Demetrius the Aristotelian. Now Cato had to decide what to do with himself, as it was clear that Caesar would have pardoned him, not just out of respect, but also to establish his dictatorship on a higher moral ground than that offered by the arbitrary slaughterhouse that Rome had seen under Sulla. After a last dinner and philosophical conversation with Apollonides and Demetrius, he retired in his room, intent on reading Plato's *Phaedo*, which recounts the last hours of Socrates' life, spent in philosophical conversation with his friends.

Once he finished reading, he picked up his dagger — for which he had vociferously called earlier that evening, to overcome the recalcitrance of his attendant and family, who had surmised what was going to happen — and attempted to stab himself to death. He failed, due to an injury to his hand. Plutarch tells us what happened next:

“Cato did not immediately die of the wound; but struggling, fell off the bed, and throwing down a little mathematical table that stood by, made such a noise that the servants, hearing it, cried out. And immediately his son and all his friends came into the chamber, where, seeing him lie weltering in his own blood, great part of his bowels out of his body, but himself still alive and able to look at them, they all stood in horror. The physician went to him, and would have put in his bowels, which were not pierced, and sewed up the wound; but Cato, recovering himself, and understanding the intention, thrust away the physician, plucked out his own bowels, and tearing open the wound, immediately expired.”

According to Plutarch, upon hearing the news, Caesar remarked: “Cato, I grudge you your death, as you would have grudged me the preservation of your life.”

VI. The legacy



We have reached the end of this short series looking into the life and philosophy of Cato the Younger, one of the classic Stoic role models. Following Rob Goodman and Jimmy Soni's book, [Rome's Last Citizen](#), we started with indicative, symbolic, even, episodes [from Cato's childhood](#), examined his conscious [embracing of Stoicism](#), saw him commanding the respect of his troops but also [weeping at the death of his half-brother](#), clashing with his [friend-and-rival Cicero](#), and finally [choosing suicide](#) — by gruesome means — in order not to concede a political advantage to his arch-enemy, Julius Caesar. (Image: Cato's daughter, and Brutus' wife, Porcia)

Interestingly, it was Caesar who ordered the first known portrait of the death of Cato, seen ripping off his own guts when his dagger failed, with the intention of dehumanizing him. The dictator paraded the painting during his triumphal return in Rome, but it backfired, inspiring pity for his vanquished foe among the people.

It was then Cicero, the long time friend and sometimes opponent of Cato, who sat down to write a biography of the Stoic, despite the fact that Cicero now owed his life to Caesar, and could have reasonably be afraid of offending the dictator. Cicero's Cato is lost, unfortunately, but it clearly had an impact, beginning to build the myth that resonated through the centuries. (Interestingly, it was Brutus — who later became one of the chief conspirators against Caesar — to push Cicero into action.)

Cicero's book was published in 46 BCE, and Caesar did not appreciate it. Rather than react with magnanimity, as his carefully groomed public image would have required, he ordered his ghostwriter, Hirtius, to write a fiery response. Which also backfired: Hirtius'

Cato, also lost to time, was apparently so over the top that Cato gained even more sympathy among the people of Rome. It isn't easy to criticize a dead man, apparently. This is the point in the story when we encounter one of the few female characters in ancient Stoicism or, indeed, in ancient philosophy: Porcia, Cato's daughter, married to the very same Brutus mentioned above.

The rumor among Republican sympathizers was that Brutus had divorced his first wife and married Porcia out of respect for Cato. Be that as it may, he was going through a rough period, waking up at night in a sweat, clearly worried about something. Porcia asked him what troubled him, but before doing so she set out to prove to him that she could hold any dangerous secret he may reveal, even under torture. Plutarch tells us how she reassured Brutus:

"She took a little knife, such as barbers use to cut the fingernails, and after banishing all her attendants from her chamber, made a deep gash in her thigh, so that there was a copious flow of blood, and after a little while violent pains and chills and fever followed from the wound. Seeing that Brutus was disturbed and greatly distressed, in the height of her anguish she spoke to him thus: 'Brutus, I am Cato's daughter.... Now I know that I am superior even to pain.' Thus having spoken, she showed him her wound and explained her test; whereupon Brutus, amazed and lifting his hands to heaven, prayed that he might succeed in his undertaking and thus show himself a worthy husband of Porcia."

That undertaking, of course, was the famous conspiracy against Caesar, on the Ides of March 44 BCE. The conspiracy succeeded, but Brutus and the others were eventually hunted down by Marc Anthony and Octavian, the latter going on to become the first emperor, Caesar Augustus. When Porcia heard of Brutus' defeat and death, she committed suicide, allegedly by swallowing burning coals, though more likely by asphyxiation from their fumes.

Ironically, Augustus actually embraced — in theory — both Republican values and Cato's memory, probably because he was a savvier politician than Caesar himself. When once

visiting Cato's house, he interrupted a sycophant who was criticizing the Stoic figure, saying that "To seek to keep the established constitution unchanged is a sign of a good citizen and a good man."

Cato also makes an appearance in Virgil's Aeneid, the epic poem commissioned by Augustus to provide a strong mythological root for the founding of Rome and, indirectly, for the empire he created. Here is one scene, taking place in the underworld:

Vulcan added the house of Tartarus,
the high doorways of Dis,
the penalties of crime;
and Catiline, you hanging
on a cliff that threatens,
trembling at the Furies' faces;
and, set apart,
the pious who receive
their laws from Cato.

Seneca, of course, was famous for his reverence of Cato. Here are some examples:
[about choosing a good role model] "Choose a Cato; or, if Cato seems too severe a model, choose ... a gentler spirit."

Or: "For Cato did not survive freedom, nor freedom Cato."

Lucan, who was Seneca's nephew, wrote the poem Pharsalia (named after [the battle where Caesar defeated Pompey](#)), which was originally intended as in praise of Nero, but ended up a scathing criticism of the regime (which, predictably, cost Lucan his life). He too contributed to the myth of Cato: "The victorious cause was dear to the gods; the lost cause, to Cato."

Eventually, of course, the Christians came on the scene. They had to deal with Cato too, and their approach was to chide him for, basically, showing off, especially in death. From their perspective, he was guilty of the sin of pride. And yet, even Christian authors couldn't avoid admiring Cato, with Tertullian, for instance, criticizing the Romans for failing to deify the Stoic figure!

Augustine was both a great admirer of Cato and one of his harshest Christian critics. He considered him almost a pre-Christian in terms of virtue, but of course suicide was not admissible for the new religion, and Cato was most famous (and most admired) precisely for the way he walked through what Epictetus in the meantime had termed "[the open door](#)." (Image: Cato, Dante and Virgil at the entrance of Purgatory)



Centuries later, at the dawn of humanism, Dante gave Cato a prime role in his Divine Comedy, having the Stoic stand guard at the entrance of the Mountain of Purgatory. Why?

Because as the poet put it, “What man on earth was more worthy to signify God than Cato? Surely none.”

Dante spared Hell to Cato because, although he was a pagan, and died by his own hand, he died for freedom. That set the stage for a new phase of Cato’s legacy: as a revolutionary and a personification of secular virtue. During the late 17th century, Joseph Addison wrote a play titled *Cato: A Tragedy*, which became influential in both the Old and the New worlds, eventually being quoted by George Washington to inspire his own revolutionary troops at [Valley Forge](#). Incidentally, Washington had begun to read Seneca at age 17, and biographer Ron Chernow writes: “As his life progressed, Washington would adhere to the stoic creed of governing one’s passions under the most adverse circumstances and facing the prospect of death with serenity.”

When *Cato: A Tragedy* was staged in England, both the Tories and the Whigs fell in love with it, vying to identify their party and their values with the main character. As Goodman and Soni remind us, Alexander Pope wrote that “Cato was not so much the wonder of Rome itself in his days as he is of Britain in ours,” while Voltaire called Cato “the greatest character that was brought upon any stage.” When Addison’s play reached America, it became a success equaled only, much later on, by Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. It was rich in aphorisms, which came to be regularly deployed by the likes of Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, among others.

In 1720 a series of [anonymous letters began to appear](#) in the *London Journal*, signed only “Cato.” An example reads: “Thus it is that liberty is almost everywhere lost: Her foes are artful, united and diligent: Her defenders are few, disunited, and inactive. ... This passion for liberty in men, and their possession of it, is of that efficacy and importance, that it seems the parent of all the virtues.” The 144 letters by “Cato” became a best-seller, popularizing ideas about natural rights and limited government. It is in reference to those letters that the libertarian think tank, the Cato Institute, is named.

In 1728 the opera *Catone in Utica* was presented at the Teatro delle Dame in Rome, though the initial reaction was negative because of the grizzly, prolonged scene portraying Cato's death. The librettist, Pietro Metastasio, ended up rewriting that scene and having Cato die off stage.

And so we get to our own days, when Cato the Younger is still, more than two thousand years after his death, a looming figure in Western history, and of course a renewed role model for new generations of Stoics. We don't simply accept the myth, we are interested in the real man, because — not in spite — of his failings. All Stoics are failed Stoics, say Goodman and Soni in their biography, though a better way to put it is: all Stoics are students and practitioners, not Sages. And that goes for Cato as well.

VII. Seneca on Cato: the best quotes



The Stoics were big on both real life (Socrates) and fictional (Heracles) role models. That's because virtue ethics is focused on the improvement of the individual character, something that can be achieved only by practice after other people's examples. For the Stoics (unlike for Aristotle) virtue is both

[technē](#) (i.e., craftsmanship) and [epistēmē](#) (i.e., knowledge), which is why John Sellars famously suggested that Stoic virtue is a kind of “performative [art of living](#).” (For more on the specific Stoic version of virtue ethics see [here](#) and [here](#).) For Seneca ([not a role model himself](#)), the most recurrent example of someone to emulate was Cato the Younger. So this essay is an homage to both Seneca and especially Cato, listing the best quotes from all the works of Seneca ([Delphi complete edition](#)) that I could find in which the Roman statesman mentions his fellow Stoic. Enjoy.

Was any one ever so blind to the truth as to suppose that Marcus Cato was disgraced by his double defeat in his candidature for the praetorship and the consulship? that disgrace fell on the praetorship and consulship which Cato honored by his candidature. (To My Mother Helvia, On Consolation, XIII)

Choose therefore a Cato; or, if Cato seems too severe a model, choose some Laelius, a gentler spirit. Choose a master whose life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector or your pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our characters; you can never straighten that which is crooked unless you use a ruler. (Letters to Lucilius, XI, On the Blush of Modesty, 10)

Socrates was ennobled by the hemlock draught. Wrench from Cato's hand his sword, the vindicator of liberty, and you deprive him of the greatest share of his glory. (Letters to Lucilius, XIII, On Groundless Fears, 14)

But why should I not tell you about Cato, how he read Plato's book on that last glorious night, with a sword laid at his pillow? He had provided these two requisites for his last moments, – the first, that he might have the will to die, and the second, that he might have the means. (Letters to Lucilius, XXIV, On Despising Death, 6)

Drawing the sword, –which he had kept unstained from all bloodshed against the final day, he cried: "Fortune, you have accomplished nothing by resisting all my endeavors. I have fought, till now, for my country's freedom, and not for my own, I did not strive so doggedly to be free, but only to live among the free. Now, since the affairs of mankind are beyond hope, let Cato be withdrawn to safety." So saying, he inflicted a mortal wound upon his body. After the physicians had bound it up, Cato had less blood and less strength, but no less courage; angered now not only at Caesar but also at himself, he rallied his unarmed hands against his wound, and expelled, rather than dismissed, that noble soul which had been so defiant of all worldly power. (Letters to Lucilius, XXIV, On Despising Death, 7-8)

I desire a life of honor. Now a life of honor includes various kinds of conduct; it may include the chest in which Regulus was confined, or the wound of Cato which was torn open by Cato's own hand, or the exile of Rutilius, or the cup of poison which removed Socrates from gaol to heaven. (Letters to Lucilius, LXVII, On Ill-Health and Endurance of Suffering, 7)

Behold Marcus Cato, laying upon that hallowed breast his unspotted hands, and tearing apart the wounds which had not gone deep enough to kill him! Which, pray, shall you say to him: "I hope all will be as you wish," and "I am grieved," or shall it be "Good fortune in your undertaking!"? (Letters to Lucilius, LXVII, On Ill-Health and Endurance of Suffering, 13)

You need not think that none but great men have had the strength to burst the bonds of human servitude; you need not believe that this cannot be done except by a Cato. (Letters to Lucilius, LXX, On the Proper Time to Slip the Cable, 19)

The Catos, the Scipios, and the others whose names we are wont to hear with admiration, we regard as beyond the sphere of imitation; but I shall now prove to you that the virtue of which I speak is found as frequently in the gladiators' training-school as among the leaders in a civil war. (Letters to Lucilius, LXX, On the Proper Time to Slip the Cable, 22)

Cato will bear with an equally stout heart anything that thwarts him of his victory, as he bore that which thwarted him of his praetorship. The day whereon he failed of election, he spent in play; the night wherein he intended to die, he spent in reading. (Letters to Lucilius, LXXI, On the Supreme Good, 11)

Therefore Cato's honorable death was no less a good than his honorable life, since virtue admits of no stretching. Socrates used to say that verity and virtue were the same. Just as truth does not grow, so neither does virtue grow; for it has its due proportions and is complete. (Letters to Lucilius, LXXI, On the Supreme Good, 16)

Death in itself is neither an evil nor a good; Cato experienced death most honorably, Brutus most basely. Everything, if you add virtue, assumes a glory which it did not possess before. We speak of a sunny room, even though the same room is pitch-dark at night. (Letters to Lucilius, LXXXII, On the Natural Fear of Death, 13)

Your dandy would no doubt seem refined and well-attended in comparison with Marcus Cato, – your dandy, who, in the midst of all his luxurious paraphernalia, is chiefly concerned whether to turn his hand to the sword or to the hunting-knife. (Letters to Lucilius, LXXXVII, Some Arguments in Favor of the Simple Life, 9)

[Listen to precepts] like the famous Wisdom of Cato “Buy not what you need, but what you must have. That which you do not need, is dear even at a farthing.” (Letters to Lucilius, XCIV, ON the Value of Advice, 27)

If I had to describe Cato, who was unterrified amid the din of civil war, who was first to attack the armies that were already making for the Alps, who plunged face-forward into the civil conflict, [hero] is exactly the sort of expression and attitude which I should give him. (Letters to Lucilius, XCV, On the Usefulness of Basic Principles, 69)

We might picture that last and bravest wound of Cato’s, through which Freedom breathed her last. (Letters to Lucilius, XCV, On the Usefulness of Basic Principles, 72)

All ages will produce men like Clodius, but not all ages men like Cato. (Letters to Lucilius, XCVII, On the Degeneracy of the Age, 10)

Separate trials have been overcome by many: fire by Mucius, crucifixion by Regulus, poison by Socrates, exile by Rutilius, and a sword-inflicted death by Cato; therefore, let us also overcome something. (Letters to Lucilius, XCVIII, On the Fickleness of Fortune, 12)

Change therefore to better associations: live with the Catos, with Laelius, with Tubero. Or, if you enjoy living with Greeks also, spend your time with Socrates and with Zeno: the former will show you how to die if it be necessary; the latter how to die before it is necessary. (Letters to Lucilius, CIV, On Care of Health and Peace of Mind, 21)

Do you desire another case? Take that of the younger Marcus Cato, with whom Fortune dealt in a more hostile and more persistent fashion. But he withstood her, on all occasions, and in his last moments, at the point of death, showed that a brave man can live in spite of Fortune, can die in spite of her. (Letters to Lucilius, CIV, On Care of Health and Peace of Mind, 29)

You see that man can endure toil: Cato, on foot, led an army through African deserts. You see that thirst can be endured: he marched over sun-baked hills, dragging the remains of a beaten army and with no train of supplies, undergoing lack of water and wearing a heavy suit of armor; always the last to drink of the few springs which they chanced to find. You see that honor, and dishonor too, can be despised: for they report that on the very day when Cato was defeated at the elections, he played a game of ball. You see also that man can be free from fear of those above him in rank: for Cato attacked Caesar and Pompey simultaneously, at a time when none dared fall foul of the one without endeavoring to oblige the other. You see that death can be scorned as well as exile: Cato inflicted exile upon himself and finally death, and war all the while. (Letters to Lucilius, On Care of Health and Peace of Mind, 33)

“Fortune, I have nothing to do with you. I am not at your service. I know that men like Cato are spurned by you, and men like Vatinius made by you. I ask no favors.” This is the way to reduce Fortune to the ranks. (Letters to Lucilius, CVIII, On the Vanity of Place-Seeking, 4)

I shall furnish you with a ready creditor, Cato’s famous one, who says: “Borrow from yourself!” No matter how small it is, it will be enough if we can only make up the deficit from our own resources. For, my dear Lucilius, it does not matter whether you crave nothing, or whether you possess something. The important principle in either case is the same – freedom from worry. (Letters to Lucilius, CXIX, On Nature as Our Best Provider, 2)

Someone who did not know Marcus Cato struck him in the public bath in his ignorance, for who would knowingly have done him an injury? Afterwards when he was apologizing, Cato replied, “I do not remember being struck.” (On Anger, II.32)

“I am not angry,” said [Diogenes the Stoic], “but I am not sure that I ought not to be angry.” Yet how much better did our Cato behave? When he was pleading, one Lentulus, whom our fathers remember as a demagogue and passionate man, spat all the phlegm he could muster upon his forehead. Cato wiped his face, and said, “Lentulus, I shall declare

to all the world that men are mistaken when they say that you are wanting in cheek." (On Anger, III.38)

I bade you have no fears on behalf of Cato himself, because the wise man can neither receive injury nor insult, and it is more certain that the immortal gods have given Cato as a pattern of a wise man to us, than that they gave Ulysses or Hercules to the earlier ages; (On the Firmness of the Wise Person, II)

For Cato did not outlive freedom, nor did freedom outlive Cato. (On the Firmness of the Wise Person, II)

But what will the wise man do when he receives a cuff? He will do as Cato did when he was struck in the face; he did not flare up and revenge the outrage, he did not even pardon it, but ignored it, showing more magnanimity in not acknowledging it than if he had forgiven it. (On the Firmness of the Wise Person, XXIV)

To Cato the Roman people refused the praetorship, and persisted in refusing the consulship. We are ungrateful in public matters. (On Benefits, V.17)

There comes now a part of our subject which is wont with good cause to make one sad and anxious: I mean when good men come to bad ends; when Socrates is forced to die in prison, Rutilius to live in exile, Pompeius and Cicero to offer their necks to the swords of their own followers, when the great Cato, that living image of virtue, falls upon his sword and rips up both himself and the republic, one cannot help being grieved that Fortune should bestow her gifts so unjustly. (On Tranquillity of Mind, XVI)

Shall I weep for Hercules because he was burned alive, or for Regulus because he was pierced by so many nails, or for Cato because he tore open his wounds a second time? All these men discovered how at the cost of a small portion of time they might obtain immortality, and by their deaths gained eternal life. (On Tranquillity of Mind, XVI)

Socrates did not blush to play with little boys, Cato used to refresh his mind with wine after he had wearied it with application to affairs of state, and Scipio would move his triumphal and soldierly limbs to the sound of music. (On Tranquillity of Mind, XVII)

What though all be fallen into one man's power, though the land be guarded by his legions, the sea by his fleets, though Caesar's soldiers beset the city gate? Cato has a way out of it: with one hand he will open a wide path to freedom. (On Providence, II)

The gods were not satisfied with seeing Cato die once: his courage was kept in action and recalled to the stage, that it might display itself in a more difficult part: for it needs a greater mind to return a second time to death. (On Providence, II)



(back cover: Cato the Younger)

Was any one ever so blind to the truth as to suppose that Marcus Cato was disgraced by his double defeat in his candidature for the praetorship and the consulship? That disgrace fell on the praetorship and consulship which Cato honored by his candidature. (Seneca, To My Mother Helvia, On Consolation, XIII)

This booklet collects seven essays published at howtobeastoinc.org and concerning Cato the Younger. Six of the essays are commentaries on a recent biography of the man, *Rome's Last Citizen: The Life and Legacy of Cato, Mortal Enemy of Caesar*, by Rob Goodman and Jimmy Soni. The seventh essay is a collection of quotes by Seneca, praising Cato and explaining why he was such a prominent Stoic role model.

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